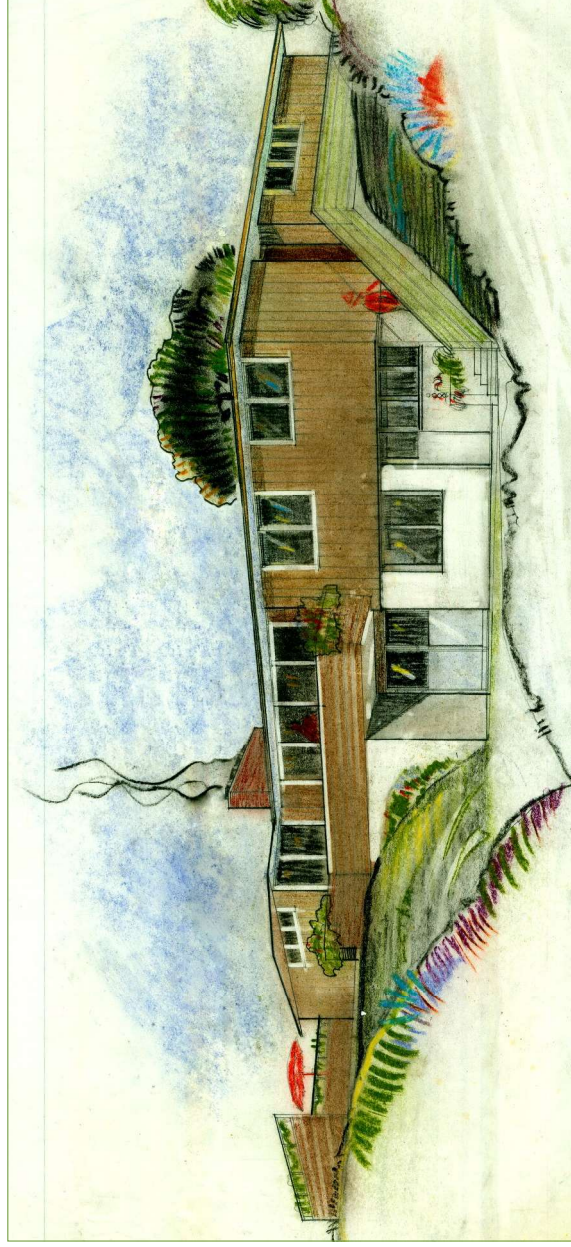


THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL
JOURNAL
Number 7
December 2018



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A Story of Unsuspected Success**

**The Centennial Rose Garden:
Remembering Our Washington State Centennial Celebration**

The Military Road in Thurston County

\$5.00

THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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Submission Guidelines

The Journal welcomes factual articles dealing with any aspect of Thurston County history. Please contact the editor before submitting an article to determine its suitability for publication. Articles on previously unexplored topics, new interpretations of well-known topics, and personal recollections are preferred. Articles may range in length from 100 words to 10,000 words, and should include source notes and suggested illustrations. Submitted articles will be reviewed by the editorial committee and, if chosen for publication, will be fact-checked and may be edited for length and content. The Journal regrets that authors cannot be monetarily compensated, but they will gain the gratitude of readers and the historical community for their contributions to and appreciation of local history.

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On the cover: *The Trueman and Virginia Schmidt house as portrayed in a perspective sketch by architect G. Stacey Bennett. Image courtesy of the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Schmidt, Trueman and Virginia, House. See article on page 2.*

THE MILITARY ROAD IN THURSTON COUNTY

James S. Hannum, M.D.

During what is often called the Puget Sound Indian War of 1855-56, the United States Army was charged with development of a unified system of roads west of the Cascade Mountains. Eventually it stretched from Seattle, in the north, to Cowlitz Landing in the south, in Lewis County. Its purpose was to facilitate rapid movement of troops and supplies. In 1856, Lieutenant George H. Mendell was tasked with oversight of construction on two segments of the Military Road. The first began at Cowlitz Landing (near Toledo, Washington) and extended north to Ford's Prairie (which lies between the west side of Centralia and the southern border of Thurston County). The second was eight miles in length and began at the Donation Land Claim of Benjamin L. Henness (immediately northeast of present-day Tenino) and terminated at Yelm Prairie (in the Donation Land Claim of James Hughes). These two pieces of the Military Road were completed in 1857 and in the same year, the road was opened all the way to Fort Steilacoom.¹

Some fragments of this system of roads can be found in King and Pierce Counties. Many motorists who drive along Interstate 5 are familiar with the exit to Military Road South, located south of SeaTac Airport in King Coun-

ty. Another segment of the Military Road can be found immediately southeast of downtown Steilacoom, in Pierce County, as Old Military Road, which becomes simply Military Road farther to the southeast.

This article will concentrate on the part of the Army's road system constructed in Thurston County. In the 21st Century, Old Military Road Southeast originates at Sussex Avenue East in Tenino, and winds its way approximately 1.7 miles to the east, where it ends on Highway 507. Farther east, Military Road Southeast begins just west of McIntosh Lake, on Highway 507, and travels northeast. It passes north of the lake, then crosses the Deschutes River and Rainier Road. The original Military Road right-of-way continues northeast, while the current Military Road Southeast curves east, becoming 123rd Avenue Southeast.

How were all these pieces of the Military Road connected historically and geographically? A certain amount of background information is necessary to answer that question. To begin, it is important to emphasize that most of what was called the "Military Road" utilized previously existing pathways. Figure 1 shows the major roads and trails that were present in this area

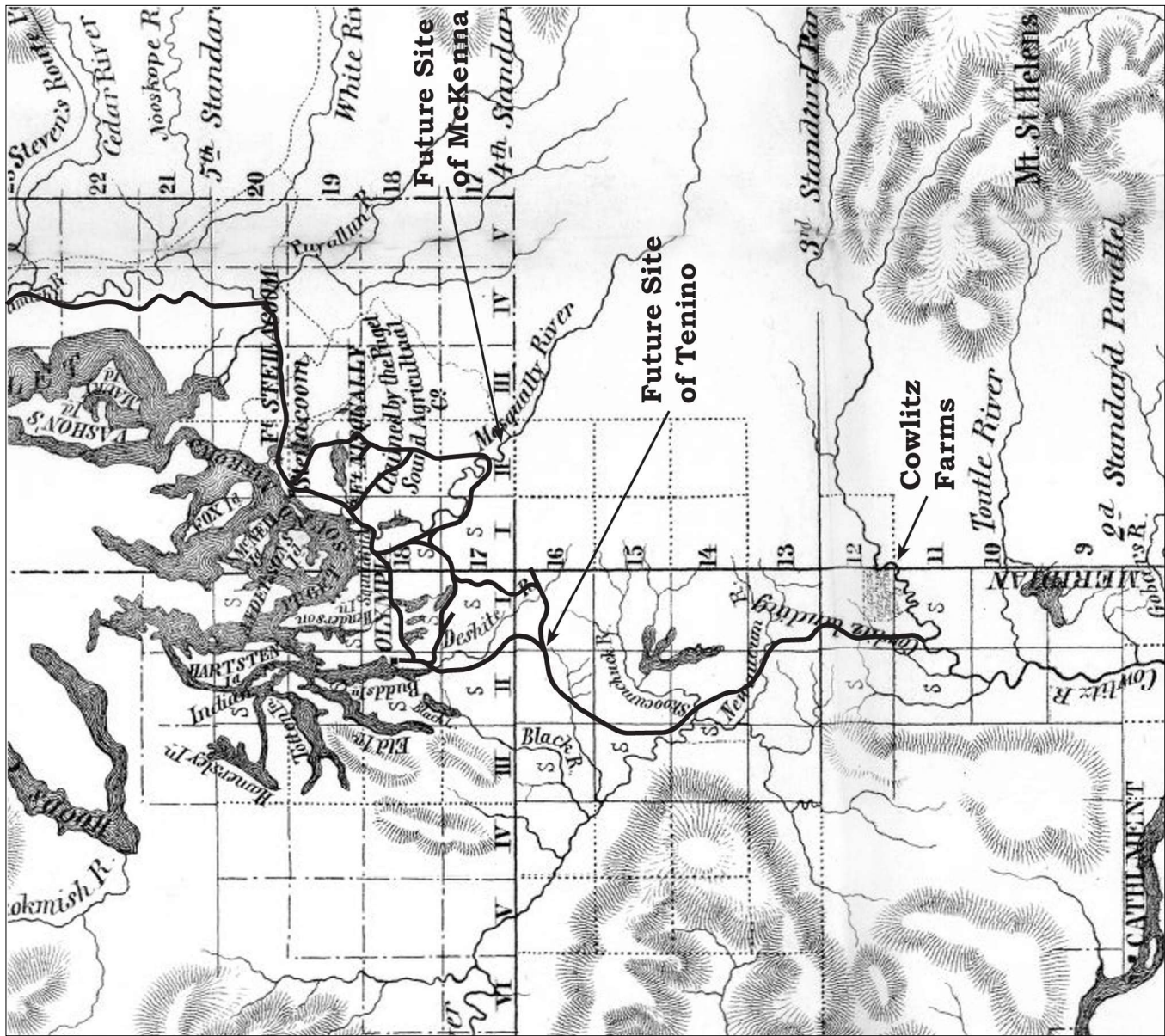


Figure 1: Roads and trails in Western Washington. Base map comes from a portion of Map of the Territory of Washington to Accompany Report of Surveyor General, 1855, by James Tilton, Surveyor General, Surveyor General's Office, Olympia, Washington Territory, September 20, 1855.

about 1855. Undoubtedly, these were routes that had been used by Native Americans for centuries. However, many of them were not improved to a degree that allowed consistent, year-round passage of wagon traffic.

Prior to the Puget Sound Indian War of 1855-56, the Puget Sound Agricultural Company (a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company) was the biggest commercial user of roads in Pierce, Thurston and Lewis Counties. It probably was responsible for much of whatever maintenance those roads

received. Farms and ranches in these counties were used to produce grain, meat, and vegetables that sustained distant Hudson's Bay Company outposts or went to overseas markets.

Figure 2 is part of the 1854 U.S. Government Land Office Original Survey of Township 11 North, Range 1 West, in Lewis County. Cowlitz Landing was on the western edge of this map and it became the southern terminal of the Military Road. The landing was located at that place because it was the farthest up river that flat-bottomed boats

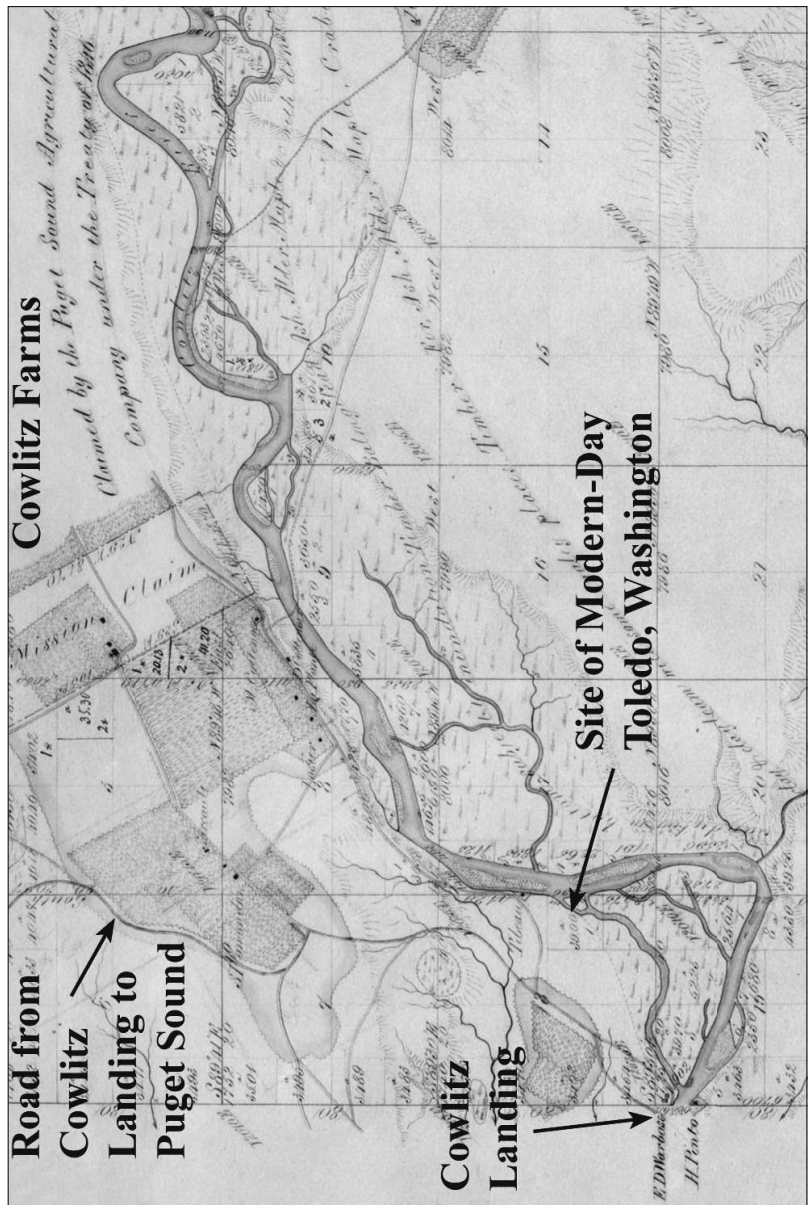


Figure 2: Cowlitz Landing and Cowlitz Farms as seen on part of the 1854 U.S. Government Land Office Original Survey of Township 11 North, Range 1 West.²

could consistently navigate. Northeast of Cowlitz Landing was Cowlitz Farms, operated by the Puget Sound Agricultural Company. Most of the grain used by the Hudson's Bay Company was produced there, and much of it was exported to Russian posts in Alaska.

Although when proposed the Military Road was intended to go all the way to Bellingham, Seattle was as far north as it finally was constructed. In Pierce County, Fort Steilacoom and Fort Nisqually were important outposts along the road. Fort Nisqually, located

within modern-day DuPont, Washington, was an important Hudson's Bay Company trading center, with nearby prairies suitable for grazing animals and crop production. Approximately 3.5 miles to the northeast, Fort Steilacoom developed as a U.S. Army outpost near the civilian community of Steilacoom. Its grounds are now the site of Western State Hospital. Both forts were found on the base map used to create Figure 1.

Figure 3 is part of the 1868 U.S. Government Land Office Original Survey

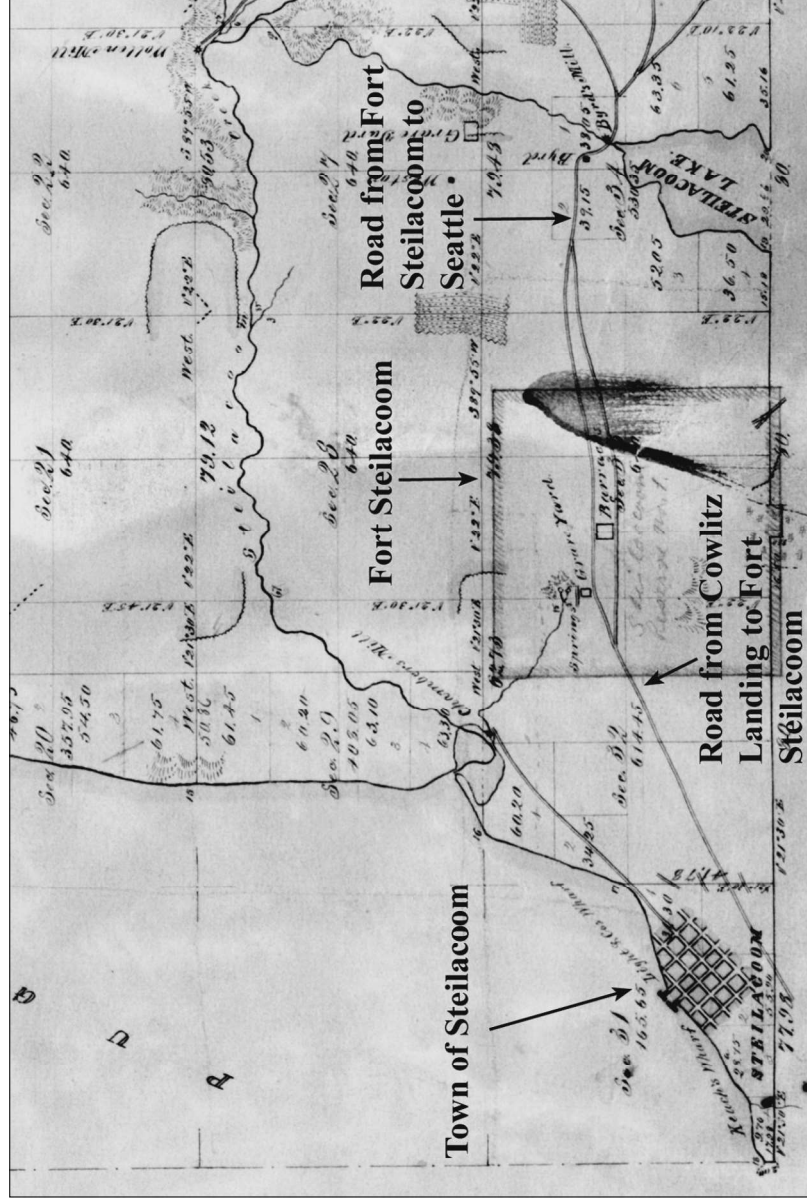


Figure 3: Fort Steilacoom as seen on part of the 1868 U.S. Government Land Office Original Survey of Township 20 North, Range 2 East.

of Township 20 North, Range 2 East, in Pierce County. The Town of Steilacoom is visible, and Fort Nisqually would have been to the southwest of that settlement. The barracks of Fort Steilacoom can be seen, as well as the road from Fort Steilacoom to Seattle.

The purpose of the Military Road was to facilitate Army operations; therefore, a reliable and direct route between Fort Steilacoom and Cowlitz Landing was considered desirable. The existing, pre-1855 crossing of the Nisqually River, near Nisqually Reach, must have been deemed unacceptable. As a result, an entirely new right-of-way was selected for part of the Military Road in Thurston County. It connected to the "Road from Yelm Prairie to the Ford," which crossed the Nisqually approximately 0.5 mile downriver (north) of the location of modern-day McKenna. Figure 4 is part of the 1856 U.S. Government Land Office Survey of Township 17 North, Range 2 East. This survey was created just before the new right-of-way for the Military Road was opened.

In Thurston County, the portion of the Military Road between Section 12 of Township 16 North, Range 1 West (originally surveyed in 1856) and Section 24 of Township 17 North, Range 1

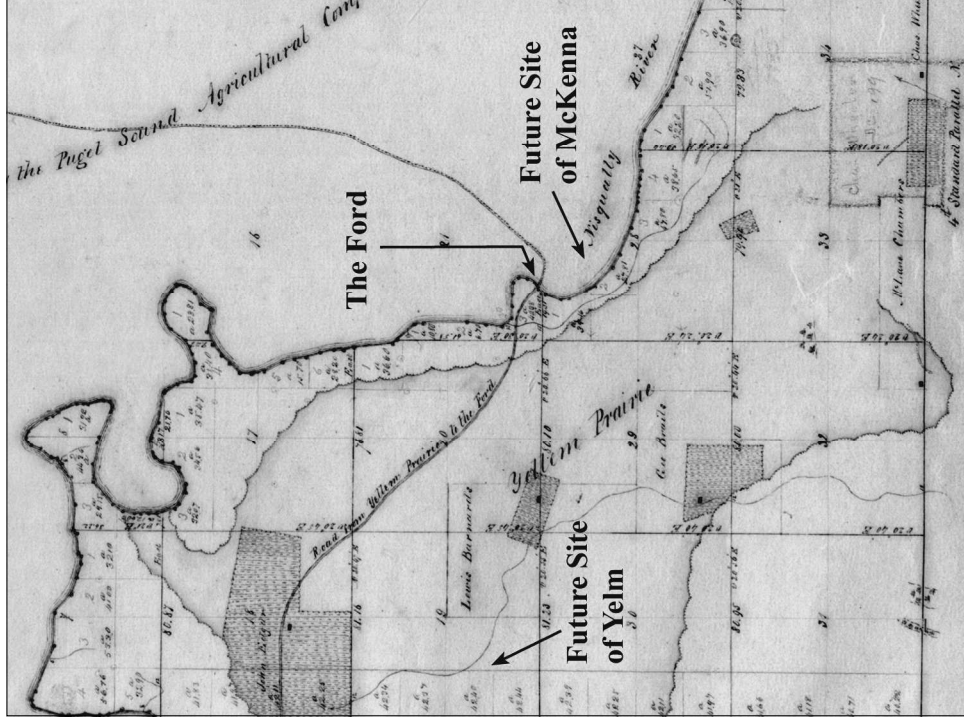


Figure 4: "The Ford," which was incorporated into the Military Road in 1857, as seen on part of the 1856 U.S. Government Land Office Original Survey of Township 17 North, Range 2 East.

East (originally surveyed 1853) does not appear in either of these earliest maps of those lands. It is likely that the right-of-way between those two points had not previously been used as a road or trail. Perhaps that is because the topography through which it travels is hilly, and contains low, swampy areas.

An advertisement in an Olympia newspaper³ dated March 27, 1857 gives a glimpse of the territory through which this segment of the road would pass:

“Sealed proposals will be received in Portland, O. T., till 12 M., April 25th, for the performance of the following work on the Vancouver and Steilacoom Military Road, along a line approximately located between Henness’ prairie and Hughs’ on Yelm prairie [see Figure 8].

“Subsection 1. From the eastern extremity of Henness’ prairie to the crossing of the Tenalquot [Deschutes] river near Linklater’s claim, and including a bridge of a substantial character over the Tenalquot river—about three miles.

“Subsection 2. From the Tenalquot prairie to Hughes’ on Yelm prairie—about four miles.

“The bridge over the Tenalquot river to be 60 feet, more or less, in length—to be supported by abutments on either bank—roadway to be 12 feet wide in the clear, of 3 inch fir plank, and to be above the reach of the drift of the highest water. Approaches to the bridge to be made easy. The stringers of the bridge to be of hewn or sawed fir timber, squaring not less than one foot. Bracing above the stringers.

“The timber to be cut down and removed for a width of 25 feet; —a road bed of 12 feet in width to be free from stumps and roots. Marshy places to be passed by a substantial corduroy

road, covered with earth taken from ditches parallel to the line. Grades not to exceed one foot in ten, (10.) Such drains to be constructed as may be considered by the officer in charge to be necessary.

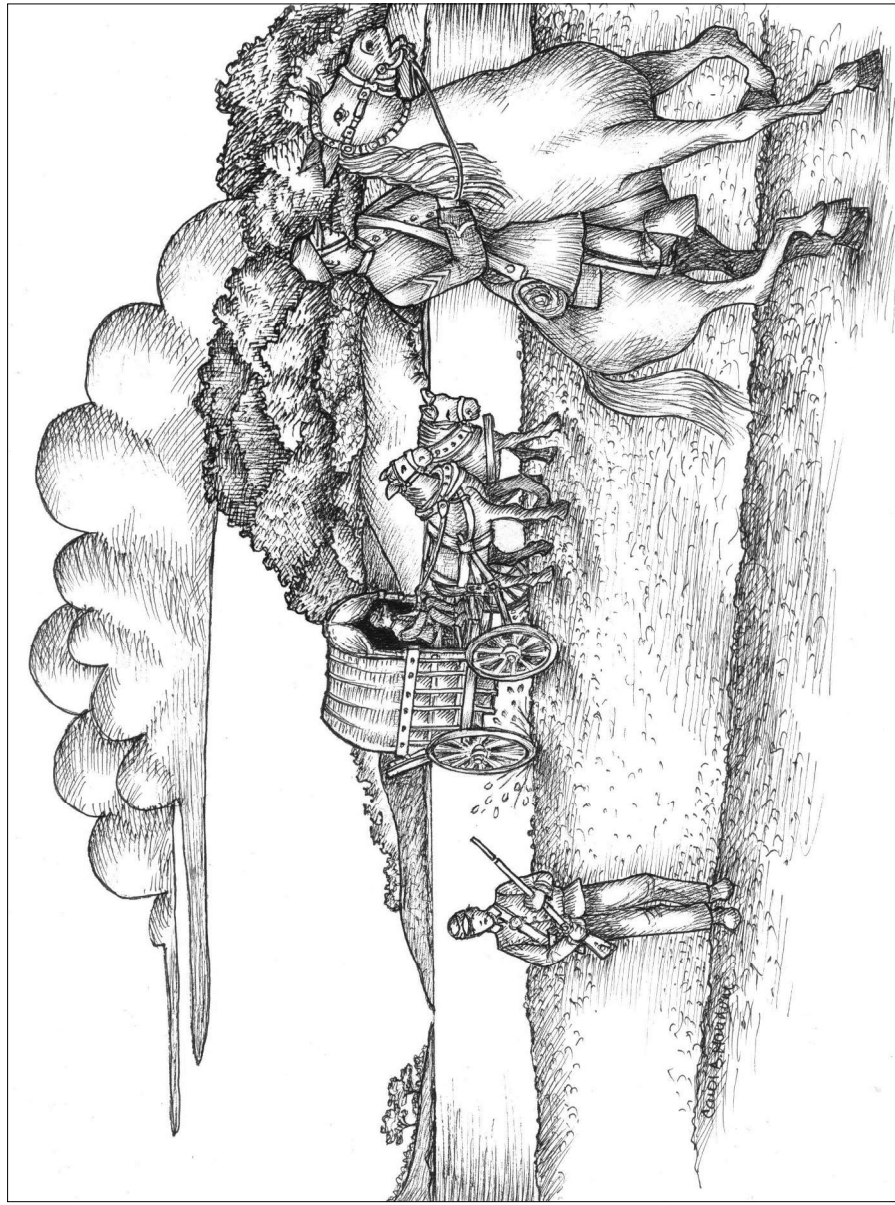
“Sub-sec. 1, will also include one fourth of a mile more or less, of corduroy bridge near Henness’.

“Bidders will specify a sum per mile for each subsection, and also for each running foot of the Tenalquot bridge Work to be completed by November 1st, 1857. Proposals to be endorsed—‘Proposals for V. & S. Military Road.’

“G. H. Mendell, Top. Engineers.”

This part of the Military Road still appeared in the 1870 map reproduced in Figure 5, even though it suffered a bridge collapse shortly after it was finished, which rendered it unusable. Another Olympia newspaper article⁴ dated July 23, 1858 reports:

“Broke Down. —The bridge across Deshutes river, near the residence of Mr. Thos. Linklater, of this county, and on the Military road leading from Monticello [modern-day Longview] to Fort Steilacoom, gave way on Friday last, and has become irreparably useless. It broke down under the weight of some eight or ten beef cattle, designed for the Steilacoom market—the property of the Messrs. Bird and brothers, of Pierce county. One or two head of the stock were seriously crippled, and Mr. Bird escaped narrowly



Artist's conception of a 9th U.S. Infantry supply wagon having just crossed the Nisqually River late in 1857 at "the Ford." Drawing by Carol B. Hannum.

going down with the bridge. The bridge and the contract, as far as completed, having been received by Mr. Mendell, the Topographical Engineer, it may be some time before the bridge will be reconstructed."

Indeed, another bridge over the Deschutes River, at this site, was not erected until many years later. Since the Indian War of 1855-56 was over, the U.S. Army apparently felt no urgent need to replace the structure. Finally, Thurston County constructed a

new span at that site in 1894. The Thurston County Board of Commissioners inspected it on September 22 of that year,⁵ and approved the bridge at their October 1, 1894 meeting.⁶ However, by that time, other roads (and railroads) had emerged which adequately met Thurston County's transportation needs, and the mostly unused right-of-way between Tenalquot Prairie and Yelm had already begun to sink into oblivion. Figure 6 is part of Henry & Henry's undated, but post-1891 map of Thurston County.

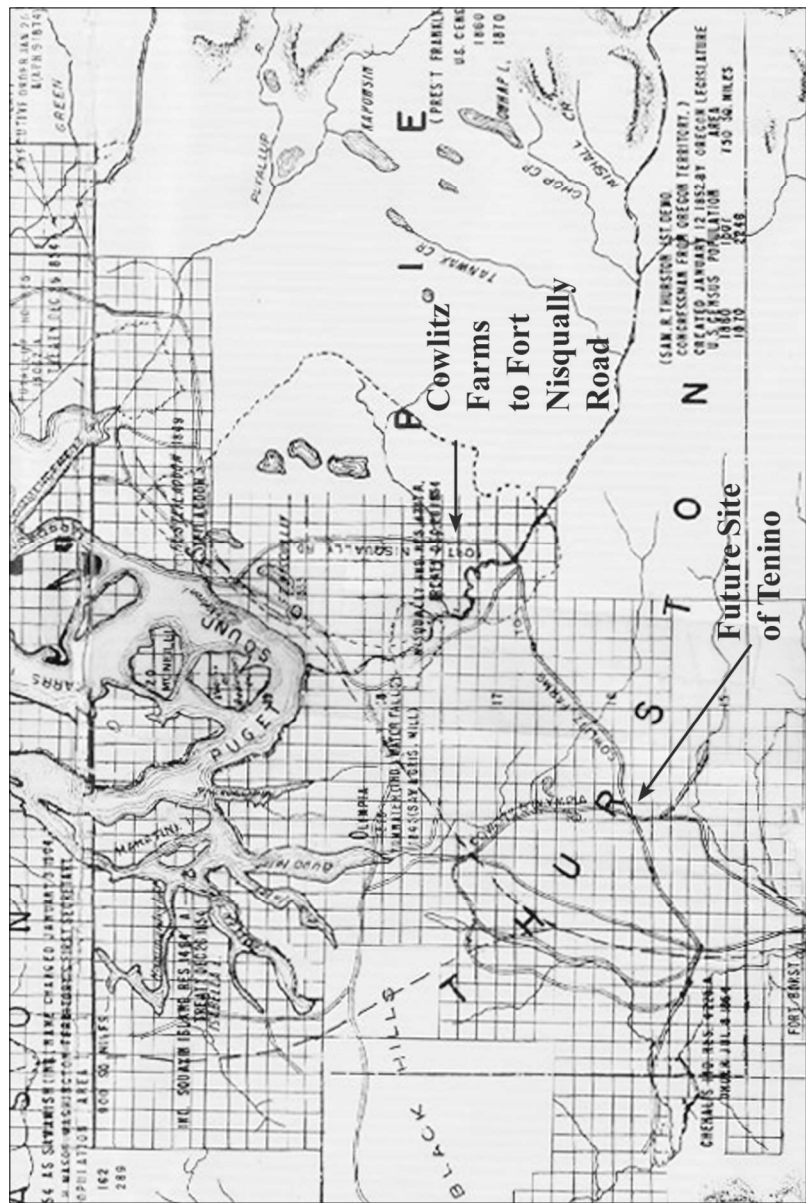


Figure 5: *The Military Road in Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis Counties, from Map of Washington Territory, West of the Cascade Mountains as of 1870, created by Ernst C. Bechley in 1951, which used as its base map the Map of the Washington Territory: West of the Cascade Mountains, by Charles A. White, originally published by C. B. Colton & Company, 1870, and preserved at the Library of Congress.*

The maintained part of the former Military Road ended in Section 33 of Township 17 North, Range 1E. Figure 7 comes from the map of the Chehalis Quadrangle printed in 1916 by the U.S. Geological Service. The Military Road right-of-way, northeast of Rainier Road, is represented merely as a trail. That trail still appears in the 1925-29 Metsker's Map of that area, but is absent from later editions.

Figure 8 focuses on the parts of Thurston County where the rather

short-lived, new segment of the Military Road was constructed. A good portion of that right-of-way now lies within the Fort Lewis Military Reservation, which limits public access to the area.

Although just a few short segments of Thurston County roadway continue to be called Military Road, that designation reminds us of the much larger transportation system that existed here before statehood. Much of that system existed even before the Military

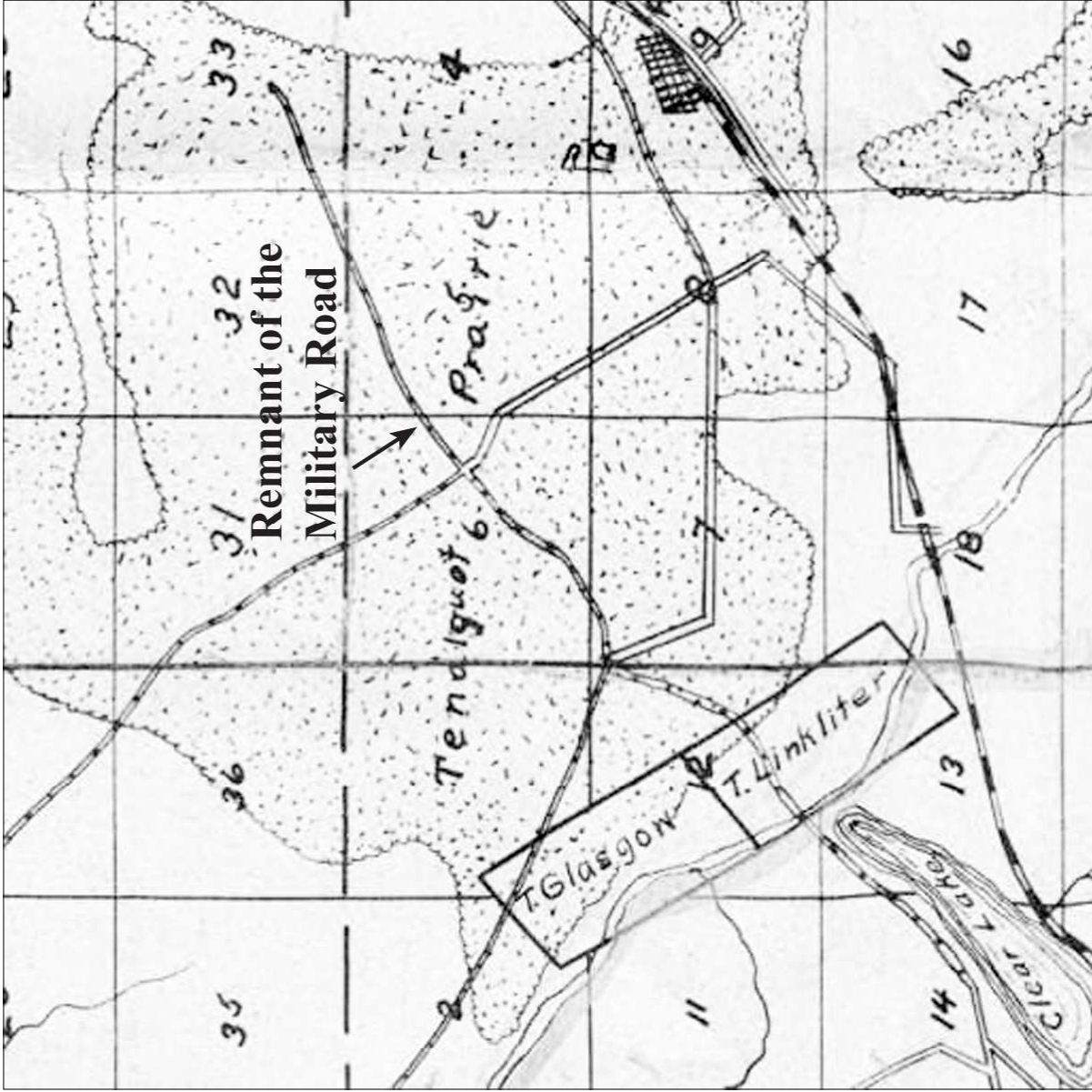
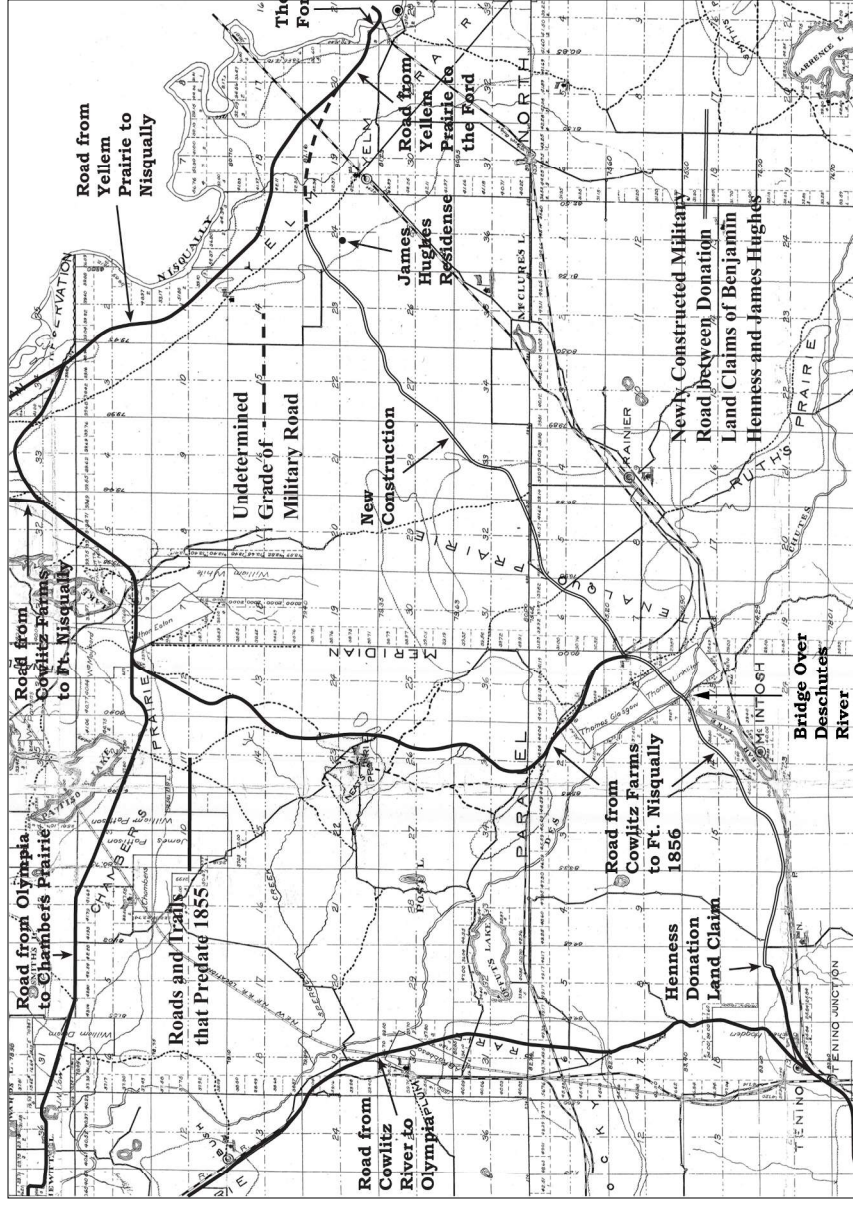


Figure 6: Portion of remaining part of Military Road in Thurston County, from Map of Thurston County, Washington, produced between 1891 and 1896 by Henry & Henry, Engineers and Surveyors, Talcott's Block, Olympia, Washington.

Road was conceived. Similarly, large modern names, such as Old Highway portions of the original, 19th Century 99. Military Road are still present in the 21st Century, having been given more



Above: *Roads and trails in Thurston County in early 1858. The base map comes from The County-Engineer's New Road Map of Thurston County, Washington—1909.*

Below: *View south along Eureka Street from Old Military Avenue E in Tenino. Photo courtesy of the author.*

